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THE BUDAPEST STRING QUARTET

Early Recordings · 1926 – 1929

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Producer's Note

"One Russian is an anarchist. Two Russians are a chess game. Three Russians are a revolution. Four Russians are the Budapest String Quartet." Or so went the witticism attributed to Jascha Heifetz. But this was not always the case. In 1917, when four players from the Budapest Opera Orchestra formed the quartet, it consisted of three Hungarians (Emil Hauser, Alfred Indig and Istvan Ipolyi, all Hubay pupils) and a Dutchman (Harry Son, who had studied with Popper). The ensemble was founded upon certain ground rules: unusually for the time, the members would confine their activities only to the quartet; and interpretational disputes would be resolved by majority vote, with ties broken by a designated repertoire specialist.

When Indig left in 1920, he was replaced by another Hungarian, Imre Pogany. It was this configuration which first entered the recording studio in 1924. HMV producer Fred Gaisberg was keen to compete with Columbia's Budapest-based Lener Quartet. Acoustic sessions devoted to the Dvořák "American" Quartet came to nought when electrical recording was introduced in 1925, and the ensemble's first issued recordings, all of which are presented here, date from a series of sessions dating from January through March of 1926.

The Russian infiltration began in the latter half of the following year. Pogany had left to join Fritz Reiner's Cincinnati Symphony (he would later move on to Toscanini's New York Philharmonic) and was replaced by Odessa-born Joseph Roisman. Roisman had studied in both his native city and Berlin, and brought a different approach that from early on challenged the Hungarians' status quo (including their playing of weak staccatos using the tip of the bow, rather than its middle).

In 1930, Harry Son left the quartet and moved to Palestine. (He was later to return to Rotterdam, ultimately becoming a victim of the Holocaust.) His position was taken in 1931 by the second Russian, Mischa Schneider. Roisman now found an ally in his interpretive disputes, and by 1932, Hauser decided to leave, selling his Guarnerius to Roisman and eventually becoming a well-regarded teacher, both in Israel and the United States. With Roisman now as leader, Alexander Schneider, Mischa's brother, was engaged for the second violin spot. Ipolyi soldiered on for several more years before leaving in 1936 to be replaced by another Odessa native, Boris Kroyt. He became a teacher and author, eventually settling in Norway.

The early quartet's recordings have had only spotty availability in extended-play format. Their 1927 Beethoven *Grosse Fuge* appeared on an EMI Références LP and a Biddulph CD. The latter also contained nearly all the rest of the quartet's Beethoven recordings, including Opp. 130 and 59/1. A CD on the Novello label featured the Schubert, Mendelssohn, Borodin and Dvořák presented here, along with the "Andante cantabile" from Tchaikovsky's First Quartet. The Haydn, Dittersdorf, Mozart and Tchaikovsky Second Quartet make their first appearances here since the 78 rpm era.

The sources for the transfers were mostly prewar American Victor editions: "Z" pressings for the Dvořák and Tchaikovsky; a "Gold" label album for the Schubert and Mendelssohn; and "Orthophonic" pressings for the Mozart and Borodin. The Haydn and Dittersdorf were taken from British HMV shellacs.

Mark Obert-Thorn

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HAYDN Quartet in G, Op. 76, No. 1 • MOZART "Hunt" Quartet
SCHUBERT "Death and the Maiden" Quartet • DVOŘÁK "American" Quartet
TCHAIKOVSKY Quartet No. 2 in F, Op. 22

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HMV Studio recordings

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THE BUDAPEST STRING QUARTET *Early Recordings*

CD 1

HAYDN Quartet in G major, Op. 76, No. 1

1 1st Mvt. - Allegro con spirito (4:34)

2 2nd Mvt. - Adagio (6:34)

3 3rd Mvt. - Menuetto - Presto (3:19)

4 4th Mvt. - Finale - Allegro ma non troppo (4:57)

5 **DITTERSDORF** Allegro (Finale) from String Quartet No. 1 in D Major (3:52)

MOZART Quartet No. 17 in B flat major, K.458 "Hunt"

6 1st Mvt. - Allegro vivace assai (7:20)

7 2nd Mvt. - Menuetto - Moderato (4:31)

8 3rd Mvt. - Adagio (7:01)

9 4th Mvt. - Allegro assai (4:54)

DVOŘÁK Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96, "American"

10 1st Mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo (6:58)

11 2nd Mvt. - Lento (7:39)

12 3rd Mvt. - Scherzo - Molto vivace (4:15)

13 4th Mvt. - Finale - Vivace ma non troppo (4:58)

Emil Hauser (Violin I), **Imre Pogany** (Violin II), **Istvan Ipolyi** (Viola) and **Harry Son** (Cello)
(Recorded in the HMV Studios, Hayes, Middlesex, 1926)

14 **BORODIN** Nocturne from Quartet No. 2 in D Major (8:37)

CD 2

SCHUBERT Quartet No. 14 in D minor, D.810, "Death and the Maiden"

1 1st Mvt. - Allegro (12:19)

2 2nd Mvt. - Andante con moto (10:13)

3 3rd Mvt. - Scherzo: Allegro molto - Trio (4:03)

4 4th Mvt. - Presto (8:28)

5 **MENDELSSOHN** Canzonetta from Quartet in E Flat Major, Op. 12 (4:20)

TCHAIKOVSKY Quartet No. 2 in F major, Op. 22

6 1st Mvt. - Adagio; Moderato assai (13:27)

7 2nd Mvt. - Scherzo - Allegro giusto (4:41)

8 3rd Mvt. - Andante ma non tanto (12:09)

9 4th Mvt. - Allegro con moto (6:44)

Emil Hauser (Violin I), **Joseph Roisman** (Violin II), **Istvan Ipolyi** (Viola) and **Harry Son** (Cello)
(Recorded in Studio C, Small Queen's Hall, London, 1928 & 1929)

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Producer and Audio
Restoration Engineer:
Mark Obert-Thorn

Detailed discographic information
can be found online at the
Pristine Classical website

Recording dates:
Haydn: January-February 1926
Dittersdorf: 4 February 1926
Mozart: January-March 1926
Dvořák: 16 February 1926
Borodin: 23 January 1928
Schubert: January 1928
Mendelssohn: 23 January 1928
Tchaikovsky: February 1929

Total duration: 2hr 35:50

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